

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 02683 010932Z

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SR-02

ORM-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 ITF-05 /064 W

----- 120080

R 010636Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5600

INFO AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: AS, PFOR

SUBJ: AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL SITUATION: RUMORS OF NATIONAL
ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY: RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH
EVENTS IN VIET-NAM HAVE REVIVED SPECULATION REGARDING EARLY
NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN AUSTRALIA. OPPOSITION LEADER FRASER
HAS AVOIDED COMMITTING HIMSELF TO NEW ELECTIONS, BUT SUPPLY
BILL (APPROPRIATIONS MEASURE) HAS NOT YET PASSED SENATE, AND
THEORETICAL POSSIBILITY OF FORCING ELECTIONS IN NEXT FEW
MONTHS STILL EXISTS. MOREOVER, RECENT POLL SHOWS SUBSTANTIAL
IMPROVEMENT IN OPPOSITION PROSPECTS. HOWEVER, ON BALANCE
WE BELIEVE OPPOSITION WILL PREFER TO WAIT UNTIL ECONOMIC
SITUATION DETERIORATES FURTHER BEFORE IT PRESSES
FOR NEW ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. EVENTS OF PAST WEEK, INCLUDING DEBACLE IN VIET-NAM, LABOR
GOVERNMENT'S APPARENT DISINTEREST IN RECEIVING ANY SUBSTAN-
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PAGE 02 CANBER 02683 010932Z

TIAL NUMBER OF REFUGEES, AND PUBLICATION OF HANOI-SAIGON

CABLES HAVE CREATED SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC FURORE IN AUSTRALIA. OPPOSITION SHADOW CABINET MEETING IN MELBOURNE APR 30 DECIDED TO SEEK RECALL OF PARLIAMENT NEXT WEEK, INSTEAD OF MAY 13, AS PRESENTLY SCHEDULED.

3. REFERRING TO PUBLICATION OF CABLES, WHOSE TENOR WAS NOTICEABLY DIFFERENT FROM PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S DESCRIPTION OF THEM IN PARLIAMENT APRIL 8, OPPOSITION LEADER FRASER SAID APR 30, QTE I REGARD THIS AS A MATTER OF THE UTMOST SERIOUSNESS. ON ALL THE EVIDENCE AVAILABLE IT APPEARS THAT A GREAT TRADITION OF PARLIAMENT HAS BEEN BREACHED BY AN AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER. THIS IS NOT A MATTER THAT PARLIAMENT OR THE PEOPLE CAN TAKE LIGHTLY. END QUOTE HOWEVER, FRASER DECLINED TO SPECULATE ON WHETHER HE WOULD PRESS FOR EARLY ELECTIONS.

4. JOURNALISTS WITH PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S PARTY IN JAMAICA REPORT THAT WHITLAM HAS DECLINED ANY COMMENT ON PUBLICATION OF CABLES AND SPECULATED THAT WHITLAM WILL MAKE NO REPLY TO OPPOSITION CALL FOR HIS RETURN TO AUSTRALIA AND EARLY SUMMONING OF PARLIAMENT.

5. FURORE OVER CABLES AND RENEWED SPECULATION REGARDING NATIONAL ELECTIONS COMES AGAINST BACKGROUND OF INCREASINGLY SOMBER ECONOMIC PROSPECTS FOR NEXT YEAR OR SO. MOREOVER, MORGAN GALLUP POLL PUBLISHED IN BULLETIN APR 30 SHOWS THAT IN POLL TAKEN ON TWO WEEKENDS OF APRIL 12 AND 19 (BEFORE DISCLOSURE OF CABLE TEXTS) LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTIES ALREADY HAD SUPPORT OF 53 PCT OF SAMPLE, COMPARED TO LABOR PARTY WITH 40PCT OF SAMPLE. DLP HAD 3PCT AND AUSTRALIA PARTY HAD 4 PCT, LARGELY CONCELLING EACH OTHER OUT. IF SAMPLE IS AS RELIABLE AS MORGAN GALLUP POLLS HAVE GENERALLY BEEN IN PAST, THIS MEANS THAT, HAD ELECTIONS BEEN HELD IN MID-APRIL, LABOR GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE BEEN REPLACED. POLL INDICATES THAT SITUATION HAS RETURNED TO WHAT IT WAS IN JAN, WHEN OPPOSITION LEAD WAS SO LARGE THAT ELECTIONS IN 1975 SEEMED ALMOST FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

6. SAME POLL ALSO SHOWS VERY SHARP DECLINE IN PUBLIC APPROVAL OF DR. J.F. CAIRNS AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FROM 60 LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PCT IN FEBRUARY TO 35 PCT IN APRIL. FEBRUARY FIGURE WAS UNUSUALLY HIGH, AS CAIRNS HAD APPROVAL RATING OF ABOUT 40 PCT DURING LAST SIX MONTHS OF 1974. HOWEVER, MANY OF THOSE POLLED AS OPPOSING CAIRNS COMMENTED ADVISELY ON HIS RECENT REMARKS EXPRESSING SATISFACTION OVER THE COMMUNIST VICTORY IN VIET NAM. HIS HANDLING OF ECONOMIC POLICY AS TREASURER PROBABLY HAS NOT HELPED THE NEGATIVE VIEW THE PUBLIC APPEARS TO TAKE OF HIM.

7. POSSIBILITY OF ELECTIONS HAD STEADILY RECEDED OVER PAST THREE MONTHS, PARTICULARLY AS FORMER OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN HAD STATED OPPOSITION WOULD NOT OPPOSE SUPPLY BILL (E.E., APPROPRIATIONS MEASURE) AND NEW OPPOSITION LEADER FRASER TOOK SAME STANCE. HOWEVER, AS MATTER OF FACT, HOUSE HAS PASSED SUPPLY BILL, BUT SENATE HAS NOT RPT NOT YET TAKEN ACTION ON IT. THEORETICAL POSSIBILITY EXISTS THAT OPPOSITION MAY DECIDE SUDDENLY TO REJECT SUPPLY BILL IN SENATE IN NEXT FEW WEEKS AND FORCE NATIONAL ELECTIONS ON ISSUE OF CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT RESULTING FROM PRESENT ECONOMIC SITUATION AND PRIME MINISTER'S DECEPTION OF PARLIAMEN ON HANOI-SAIGON CABLES.

8. AS AGAINST THIS POSSIBILITY IS MORE COGENT LOGIC THAT OPPOSITION'S INTERESTS BEST SERVED BY ALLOWING GOVERNMENT TO STEW IN ITS OWN JUICE, WITH LIKELIHOOD THAT ECONOMIC SITUATION WILL DETERIORATE STEADILY OVER NEXT YEAR OR SO, ENSURING OPPOSITION VICTORY IN 1976. LIBERAL-COUNTRY GOVERNMENT, ACCORDING TO THIS VIEW, WOULD INHERIT VERY DIFFICULT INFLATIONARY SITUATION BUT COULD BLAME IT ON LABOR GOVERNMENT DURING PERIOD WHEN IT WOULD HAVE TO ADOPT UNPOPULAR DEFLATIONARY POLICIES TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM.

9. ON THE WHOLE, WE DOUBT THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS ARE LIKELY IN NEXT FEW MONTHS, BUT SITUATION IS RAPIDLY CHANGING.
GREEN

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